

Message Text

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43

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SCCT-01 SAM-01 SAB-01 IO-10 AID-05

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05

PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 TRSE-00 /074 W

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R 041310Z AUG 75

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5624

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

USINT BAGHDAD UNN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 9871

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINS, PINR, LE

SUBJECT: ACO ARRESTS ATTRACT WIDE INTEREST

REF: (A) BEIRUT 8595; (B) BEIRUT 8982; (C) BEIRUT 9487

1. CRACKDOWNS AGAINST THE ARAB COMMUNIST ORGANIZATION (ACO) IN LEBANON AND ELSEWHERE ARE A MAJOR TOPIC OF PUBLIC DISCUSSION IN BEIRUT. THE TOUGH ATTITUDE OF THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT IN HANGING FIVE ACO MEMBERS ON THE SAME DAY THAT PRIMIN KARAME MADE HIS OFFICIAL VISIT TO DAMASCUS STIRRED PARTICULAR INTEREST, WITH EVEN MODERATE CIRCLES SHOWING SATISFACTION AT THIS NO-NONSENSE APPROACH. THIS WAS SEEN AS A MUCH-NEEDED SUPPORT TO LEBANON IN ITS OWN EFFORTS AGAINST THE ACO. THE EGYPTIAN ARRESTS WERE ALSO WELL PUBLICIZED.

2. IN LEBANON, THE ARREST OF ABOUT 20 "NON-CIVILIAN" (I.E., MILITARY OR SECURITY FORCES) PERSONNEL IS CONFIRMED, CONFIDENTIAL

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BUT THE EXACT NUMBER REMAINS UNCLEAR. THE INTERROGATION

OF THESE SUSECTS HAS JUST BEEN COMPLETED. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, THE SUSPECTS HAVE CLAIMED THAT THEY WERE NOT CONNECTED WITH THE ACO, BUT RATHER WITH THE "LEBANESE SOCIAL REVOLUTIONARY ORGANIZATION" THAT CONDUCTED TERRORIST ATTACKS AGAINST THE BANK OF AMERICA TWO YEARS AGO. THE MILITARY EXAMINING MAGISTRATE HAS REPORTEDLY ACCEPTED THIS CLAIM, AND THEREFORE THE INDICTMENTS MAY DISASSOCIATE THESE SUSPECTS FROM THE ACO.

3. THE INTERROGATION ALSO BROUGHT OUT A SENSATIONAL STORY FEATURED IN A FEW BEIRUT NEWSPAPERS THAT THE ACO AT AN EARLIER UNDISCLOSED DATE HAD PLANNED TO KILL CAMILLE CHAMOUN AND US AABASSADOR GODLEY (ONE NEWSPAPER SAID AMB BUFFUM) DURING A MEETING THAT WAS SCHEDULED BETWEEN CHAMOUN AND THE AMBASSADOR IN THE TOWN OF DEIR QAMAR. THERE HAS BEEN NO OFFICIAL COMMENT ON THIS REPORT, ALTHOUGH IT WAS ATTRIBUTED TO "JUDICIAL SOURCES."

4. COMMENTS: THESE ARRESTS HAVE TEMPORARILY BUOYED HOPE THAT THE INCREASINGLY RADICAL TREND OF LEFTIST ACTIVITY CAN BE HALTED AT LEAST TEMPORARILY. BUT AT THE SAME TIME THE CAUTIOUS APPROACH OF THE LEBANESE AUTHORITIES TO THE ACO IS SOMETIMES UNFAVORABLE COMPARED TO THE SWIFT ACTION BY SYRIA. THIS IS VIEWED AS A FURTHER EXAMPLE OF LEBANON'S "LACK OF GOVERNMENT." THE GOL, OF COURSE, MUST PROCEED CAREFULLY SO AS NOT TO STIR UP THE WRATH OF THE LEFT AND ITS FEDAYEEN ALLIES.

5. SO FAR, LEBANESE LEFTIST GROUPS HAVE NOT GONE BEYOND RELATIVELY MILD EXPRESSIONS OF PROTEST ABOUT THE ARRESTS. THE ACO AFFAIR, THEREFORE, IS AN ISOLATED CASE FOR THE MOMENT.. THE SIMULTANEOUS CRACKDOWNS ELSEWHERE IN THE ARAB WORLD HAVE BEEN HELPFUL IN THIS RESPECT. HOWEVER, THE CONNECTION BELIEVED TO EXIST BETWEEN THE ACO AND THE PFLP (REF C) MEANS THAT A WIDER LEFTIST/FEDAYEEN REACTION AT SOME STAGE CANNOT BE PRECLUDED.
GODLEY

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